Interview with Lillian E. Austin

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Foreign Service Spouse Series

LILLIAN E. AUSTIN

Interviewed By: Mary Louise Weiss

Initial Interview Date: December 28, 1989

Q: Lee, we've been watching and reading about the tremendous events going on in Eastern Europe and now particularly in Romania. Knowing that you served in Romania shortly after World War II, it must certainly be on your mind.

AUSTIN: It is. I read every article, and look back on the forty years, to the experiences I had in Romania, and it makes the past seem very real, and certainly the present fascinating.

Q: You came into the Service as a secretary in 1949?

AUSTIN: Yes.

Q: Did you come to Washington specifically for that?

AUSTIN: I came to Washington in January of that year to work in the Department. Then I studied shorthand at Strayer's night school in order to qualify for the Foreign Service which required, I guess it was 80 words a minute shorthand. After I qualified I switched from the Division of Exchange of Persons to the Foreign Service and went to classes at the Foreign Service Institute where they taught me more about typing, the right style of course for diplomatic letters, shorthand, security, diplomacy reporting, cryptography and a

little Romanian because I had been assigned there although I was sent to Naples to wait for a visa. After being a secretary at $45.00 a week, it was heady luxury to take a parlor car to New York, and to go first class on the Vulcania. We had a wonderful eleven day trip in rather warm gulf stream water over to Naples from New York. There I worked in the citizenship section [of the Consulate General]. We had to ferret out three factors which would disqualify Italians who wanted to resume their U.S. citizenship. One was that they had voted in the Italian election; second, they had served in the Italian military, or third; if they had sworn allegiance to Italy after being U.S. citizens. If any of those were applicable, they were not citizens. They had to go through the long visa line.

We had nice Italian friends, many young men and women. The U.S. Navy came. It wasn't the way it is now in Naples where there is a large naval base, and NATO, and so on. It was just the ships coming every now and then, and we had the pleasure as experts of showing the young men around Naples. Our language lessons were not paid for then, or sponsored by the Consulate General. I took them privately with a Senora Calucci going after work and paying for them myself because I wanted to learn Italian.

I traveled a great deal to Florence, to Rome to see friends there, up to Switzerland, to France. Although I was earning $2850 a year, I was on per diem because I was waiting for a Romanian visa. The dollar was high in 1950 and I was able to see a great deal of Europe and appreciate it.

In July the word came that my visa had been granted and I was able to pack up within about ten days, and to go to the farewell parties, and then take a train to Bucharest. It was the Orient Express and on the train there was no dining car. I took sandwiches, or when I got off in Budapest I would buy something — using sign language — and yet I was being paid the princely sum of $16.00 a day as I rode across Romania in per diem, which seemed like a great deal.

I arrived there August 18, 1950 and of the staff of ten, the other nine were there to meet me to sweep me off for a champagne breakfast. All during the time there the superior people, the Charg# and so on, looked out after our morale, and made us feel very, very special. In contrast to Naples where we were in a different social set than the officers, the secretaries were valued and included in every social event in Bucharest, and well treated at work. I felt very valued and appreciated.

Q: In Naples you had not been included socially at all?

AUSTIN: No. In Naples I made my own life. It was like, I suppose, a post like Paris is today where people do make their own lives. In Naples there were social casts, almost.

Q: Within the Consulate?

AUSTIN: Within the Consulate, yes.

Q: How was morale at that time in Naples?

AUSTIN: The living conditions: we lived in a very cold apartment with cold marble floors, no central heating because it's a “Mediterranean climate”, but it still got cold, and the hot water wasn't working most of the time. The morale — I don't know — by the time this cold winter passed and we were able to go to Capri, my morale wasn't bad and I don't think my friends felt too badly about being posted in Naples. I think there are always those who make the most of it, and those who gripe.

Q: But in Bucharest, by comparison, it was a different kind of a post politically and geographically, and you had a different position amongst the family group in the consulate?

AUSTIN: Morale, I thought, was really not bad for such an isolated post. It was a hardship post because of the Iron Curtain having come down. I thought they did very well. They

encouraged us to take trips. We didn't have R&R, but they encouraged us to use our leave to get out of the country at least to Vienna as often as possible, and we took turns doing each other's work.

Q: Was it difficult to get a permit to go outside the country?

AUSTIN: Not too difficult although they usually gave it to you at 6:00 p.m. when you were leaving at midnight. They made you sweat for that. The Americans were confined to the city. We were not allowed to go out except sometimes we could go a British villa in Predeal if they felt like giving us a pass. One time, just one time in the 16 months, I was able to go to Costanza and swim in the Black Sea, and this was very rare. The railroad cars had the windows blacked out so we wouldn't see anything and report on it.

Q: What were living conditions like for you as a secretary?

AUSTIN: We had a lovely warm apartment. At that time I think coal was the fuel being used. It was toasty warm. It was a large...actually not an apartment, but part of a house. A Russian lived downstairs and he helped pay the rent. We had three servants: George, the butler; Frau Fannie, the cook; and Adell, the maid. My roommate Helen had been there before me, and she had inherited (these) from previous people and because they had worked for Westerners, they were tainted. We felt that if we let them go, and didn't keep a staff of three, they would be picked up by the Securitate and so we kept this large staff and saved their lives, we hoped. And yet we knew they probably were spying on us and required to report on us. But this didn't hurt our relationships with them at all.

As far as the Romanian nationals go, and the local employees, they were in a great deal of danger. As well as having to report on us, they would be arrested and no one would ever hear of them again, and we would protest and still we wouldn't know their fate. These were people who worked in our consular section, did translating and so on. The language

teacher, Domnul Florescu, was arrested and we never found out what happened to him. He was one of the former aristocrats.

Q: It must have been difficult hiring replacements for those (local employees) people.

AUSTIN: I guess that they perhaps took someone who was a communist, who wasn't one of the loyal old ones. I remember that our landlady was another, Madame Florescu, and I would buy things from her to help her, a tea set from Vienna, and I found a note among my things that she had written about wanting me to find a buyer for some Sevnes vases because this was a help to get currency when their homes had been taken away. In fact, even renting the house from Madame Florescu was a favor to her because it gave her an income in dollars.

Speaking about the local population, I remember one time receiving some beautiful carnations addressed simply to me at 7 Strada Bitolia, and with them was a note in French saying, “Excuse an unknown person for approaching you but I think you are so wonderful, so beautiful, could you write to me now and then, and accept these flowers.” Of course, I took it to the luncheon I was going to, and we laughed and laughed because we knew it had to be a Romanian who was trying to get into my good graces and find out things.

Q: Did you let it go any further?

AUSTIN: Oh, no. No, it was just a joke.

Q: Did that happen frequently, that sort of thing?

AUSTIN: No, it didn't happen frequently. (It was) one thing that rather pleased my ego. I had spent the year in Geneva studying French so one of our officers was in charge and his assistant, who spoke French, was on leave and the summons came to the Foreign Office. So this officer asked me to go with him to translate because the language spoken would be French. It was 8:30 at night and I was greeted warmly at the Foreign Office, and there

were all these people around who greeted me by name so it was all planned. This was much more interesting than typing, or filing, or fixing up mail pouches, to be able to use the language, and to help this officer.

Q: Tell me about studying Romanian there. Did you have a person who came to the Consulate?

AUSTIN: No, no. It was again like Naples. In this case, Domnul Florescu, came to my house. He taught me but I never got to practice Romanian because they weren't to speak to us, and we couldn't speak to them. It was simply a question of learning how to deal with numbers and the servant's accounts, counting and directions, and all that sort of thing.

Q: Didn't it help in your work at the Consulate?

AUSTIN: No, not the work I was doing. We were also always picked up at our home by a chauffeur-driven Legation car. We didn't have our own cars, and we didn't take taxis. We were always chauffeured everywhere in Bucharest.

Q: For security reasons?

AUSTIN: Yes. And if we were called in to work on a weekend, the car came and picked us up and took us home afterwards.

Q: Was there a compensation in being isolated like that, in the social life, or in friendships you made?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes indeed. The friendships were close, the social life was wonderful. The amount of money that we received was fantastic. We were able to live very, very nicely and to take these wonderful trips to western Europe. It was ample compensation. However, it wasn't until I reached Lisbon, my next post, that I realized how far from normal that life had been and I really relaxed in Lisbon with normalcy.

Q: But you took it as it came because it was your first major, real working post, wasn't it?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes, and I felt like I was doing something important for the United States. I felt as though I was very needed.

Q: Did you find in comparison with your later posts, larger posts, that you felt a preference for the small posts because of the family feeling amongst you?

AUSTIN: I must say, all these years later, it is still the one I remember the most about. I remember every name, and most of the details of those 16 months — more than perhaps four years in other posts.

Q: Was there less stress in some respects in Romania than there was in...?

AUSTIN: Oh, more stress in Romania.

Q: You felt rather comfortable and seem to have had a good time in Bucharest.

AUSTIN: The standard of living was very high for us because it was a hardship post. We received 25% extra pay, and were encouraged to spend it on travel so that our morale stayed high.

Q: You got out as frequently as you seemed to feel the need for in western Europe.

AUSTIN: Yes. There were two women on the staff: my roommate Helen and myself. She was basically the code clerk, I was the secretary but we were interchangeable. So either of us could go if we planned it ahead at any time. The first Christmas might have been a difficult time but I went to Salzburg and met my friends from Naples and we went skiing. So it wasn't bad.

Q: What was your personal social life like in Bucharest?

AUSTIN: I went out on a rather platonic basis with all the groups of diplomats. Then in July of '51 a young man came to the Legation to replace the code clerk my roommate and he became a really close friend, and I hated to leave in November. When I look back on the intensity of that friendship from July until November, it hardly seems possible, but it was a touch of normalcy.

Q: Was there a lot of partying?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. There were 30 dinners in one month that I can remember. There were 30 dinners, black tie, at night. And 30 formal luncheons, and I was at every one of those.

Q: This was the diplomatic group?

AUSTIN: ...entertaining each other. Although the luncheons were long, they started out with the drinks before lunch, then there was the first course with the white wine, second course red wine, dessert with cherry or something, champagne, and then afterwards drinks were served again. And then we went back and we tied up the pouch because the couriers would be coming the next day. We went back to work. And as far as hours of work go, the men kept guard every night. There were no Marine Guards. The Legation always had an American there. On weekends the secretaries worked Saturday or Sunday. So the Legation was always guarded by (Americans) us, so there was plenty of overtime, or “comp time” available. So the long lunches were just taken out, and then you went back.

And then in the summer we worked from 7:30 to 1:00, and then went and played golf on the six holes that were left of the golf course. The “People's Park” had taken away all the rest of the golf holes.

Q: Were there heavy risks for the local employees that worked in the Legation?

AUSTIN: We felt so because every now and then they were arrested and then we heard nothing more of them. We never learned their fate.

One woman in particular, Sylvia, I remember. I used to give her letters that her brother in England wrote to me. She was English married to a Romanian and worked at the Legation translating; a very good employee. So I would pass these letters to her. After I left Bucharest, I received a letter from my roommate saying that Sylvia had been arrested, had disappeared, and the Legation had made protests but nothing had turned up. Also the language teacher had been arrested, and no further word. So I had the sad duty of writing to the brother in England to tell him that Sylvia had been arrested and he wrote back a very sad note wondering what possibly could be done to send her packages.

Q: Was this help that you gave her encouraged, or discouraged by the Charg# in any official way? Or was it something that everyone was encouraged to do to help.

AUSTIN: I think it was the sort of thing that you did quietly. You didn't ask permission to do it. It was nothing disloyal, it was nothing that would breach security.

Q: I wondered if it might have put them at more risk. Did you ever feel that it might put them at more risk?

AUSTIN: They didn't feel that. Perhaps it was a case where they received a letter in the Legation and tore it up instantly — something like that.

Q: It must have been difficult.

AUSTIN: It was difficult knowing you could not do anything to help. You were powerless.

Q: Did you have any other posts that had this kind of problem?

AUSTIN: No, no. That was unique. The posts were Naples and Bucharest in that tour of duty, home leave, and then Lisbon. One interesting thing, which I think is still true — after the difficult post they assigned me to Rome because they knew I had liked Naples and they wanted to reward me.

Q: It's nice to know that that is done.

AUSTIN: I went back to them and I said, “I'd like a post by the sea. What about Tangier?” And they said, “Tangier isn't open. You could be the DCM's secretary in Lisbon.” I said, “I'll take it.” So they did help me. So the next post was Lisbon where I met my future husband, and then with him went to Tokyo, Panama and Rome.

Q: Did you marry him there?

AUSTIN: Oh, no. For one thing, he was a Marine Guard and they weren't allowed to marry on embassy duty; and also we both were close to our families. We agreed we would marry at home.

Q: You were a secretary in Lisbon?

AUSTIN: I was a secretary in Lisbon, yes.

Q: How did that seem after being behind the Iron Curtain?

AUSTITerribly normal. And there was a much wider canvas to paint on. There were many more people.

Q: This was an Embassy?

AUSTIN: This was an Embassy, yes. I immediately started learning the language, and I had a roommate. Actually, while I was assigned as secretary to the DCM, the previous occupant of the position broke her engagement and stayed. So they put me in the economic section talking about codfish, trade with Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique and so on, and I hated it. My roommate's boyfriend was a political officer and I said to him one time, “If I must do much more about codfish I'm resigning.” So he got me into the political section, which was closer to where I felt I should be. He also let me

write reports and things because I was preparing for my second try at the Foreign Service exam. He let me write some of the biographical sketches, and so on.

Q: It was a challenge for you. Tell me about language training. Did you then, and there, have language training through the Embassy?

AUSTIN: Oh, no. Again I had a private tutor at home, paid for by myself. I must say though, because I met my husband to be early on, and we spoke in English, but my Portuguese was never as good as these other languages such as Italian or French, but I was a happier person.

Q: Was there any post you were in at all where you were able to learn the language sponsored by the Embassy?

AUSTIN: Yes, indeed. In Japan everybody was given free, at the Embassy, the 100 hours of Japanese language.

Q: Were you then a wife?

AUSTIN: I was a wife then, yes. And I enjoyed learning it, and I enjoyed the contact with the other people because I had four children then and I had done a great deal of domestic duties so to be out in a language class was stimulating. The only note that's a bit ironic — this was 1967-'69 — was that at the end of the 100 hours, there was a ceremony in which the ambassador gave certificates out to my husband and other employees, but not to the spouses. No recognition for the study at all. This was, of course, twenty years ago.

Q: I wonder if it's done now?

AUSTIN: I'll bet it's done now, but I don't know. And then in Panama I had studied Spanish previously so I was easily put in the top language class, and really used Spanish a lot with the Panamanians. And then in Italy, because of having learned Italian all those years

previously, I found myself also in the top group and I took the qualifying test and I got a 3 and a 2+ on Italian.

Q: Language always opened other doors.

AUSTIN: Yes.

Q: Tell me more about your life and your work in Lisbon.

AUSTIN: I arrived there after another lovely trip across the ocean on the S.S. Constitution. We landed at Gibraltar, came up through Spain, and then came over to Lisbon on a train. I stayed at the Hotel Tivoli while apartment hunting, and on a weekend I went down to the Embassy to type a letter home. As I came out the young man at the desk, the Marine, said to me, “Did you sign in?” And I said, “No.” And he said, “Well, you should have.” So we stood and talked for a little while, and he called me up soon and asked me if I would like to have dinner and go to the movies with him. So he came to pick me up, and we had a lovely evening with another couple — dinner, the movies — and then fado singing. I remember he said, “shuush” as I spoke during the fados. I thought, “Hmm, people didn't, shuusme very much.” But it is very insulting to the singers if you talk during their presentation. So I had a wonderful time but he didn't call me again. And a couple of weeks passed, and I thought, “Gee, maybe he didn't enjoy the evening.” It turned out it was the two weeks between paydays! He called me about two weeks later and we went out again. And really, within a few months we were very seriously dating, and by November we announced our engagement at the Marine Ball.

Q: How wonderful.

AUSTIN: Everyone thought the announcement was going to be another couple, but I whipped off my long white glove, and there was the engagement ring. It was fun. Unfortunately, Ted had to go back four months before I did. He went back in February,

and I followed the end of June, but we then went to meet his family and prepared for our marriage the next November.

Q: You were married at home?

AUSTIN: We were married at home, yes.

Q: And then your next post was from a different point of view.

AUSTIN: Our next post together was Parris Island, South Carolina which was quite different, but I started teaching school. I taught world history to sophomores who called me “Ma'am” and kidded me about the fact that in the breaks I would rush down to the teacher's lounge for a cigarette — the five minutes between classes. I found I had good status there as a teacher in the town. Our two sons were born there. We made friends who are still friends 36 years later.

Then Ted went to Miami University on the GI Bill and got his bachelor's degree in business and worked in private industry for several years. Then he saw an ad in the New York Times for accountants, budget officers, in the State Department. And what got his eye in 1966 was $10,000 a year, which was his aim. So he applied, we went down to Washington for assignment, and it was the East Asian Division that he was going to. And he came out and I said, “Don't tell me. Is it Tokyo?” He said, “How did you guess?” I said, “It's the only decent place in East Asia.” This was at the time of the Vietnam War. So we packed up the children, and went to Tokyo for our first post.

Q: Speaking of Foreign Service entry, what happened to your own?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. I passed the exam in Lisbon. Four of us took it: two of us passed it, and on my engagement becoming formal I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State resigning from the Foreign Service for reasons of marriage.

Q: You had been accepted into the Foreign Service?

AUSTIN: Well, I never took the oral. I could have taken the oral when I went back to Washington, but because I knew that I was going to be married I did not take the oral, just the written. So people wondered if this was the right decision. I knew it was and still do. Yes, I passed the written. Ted said to me some years ago, “You might have been an ambassador.” I said, “Yes, but I wouldn't have had you and the children. I prefer what I got.”

Q: He wouldn't have wanted to be a dependent.

AUSTIN: No. And, you know, that just wasn't done. It wasn't done until 1970 I don't think, or '72.

Q: You were raising a family and playing a different role entirely during the '60s after you were in Lisbon, until your husband went to Tokyo in 1967.

AUSTIN: The beginning of '67, yes. We found old friends in Tokyo. In fact, Betty Betts from Lisbon was there as Personnel Officer. So she gave us extra good orientation. We lived in Grew house, a lovely four bedroom apartment in Grew house.

Q: Is that an apartment building?

AUSTIN: It was an apartment building in the “Golden Ghetto.” And I began doing volunteer work. I headed up the youth program for summer there. It was tennis and swimming for all the children who were interested. And the way I got into that: there was an Embassy coffee and they said, “How many of you are interested in having your children have tennis and swimming lessons this summer?” I was one that raised my hand and they said, “You can be chairman.” That's how they got me. Another woman said, “I'll be glad to help you. I'll be up in the mountains a lot of the time this summer, but I will help you when I'm in

town." The program was very successful, and my children did get swimming and tennis lessons. But as one friend said, "You were on the telephone all summer."

Q: Did you miss your other role as secretary? You were in the same setting, but in an entirely different role.

AUSTIN: I tried very hard to do a lot, to entertain a lot, and I taught Japanese people English. I had classes that came to the house, and I just loved that.

Q: Did you take the course teaching English as a second language?

AUSTIN: Oh, no. At that time I don't think it existed. I just did it. A woman came up to me after our arrival and said, "We're being transferred, do you want my class." And it was relatively big bucks. Then too, Ted and I found the prosperity was great for our circumstances because there was no rent to pay, and no utilities, and we were able to start saving some money which we had not been able to do in the States.

Q: Was the cost of living not as tremendously high there?

AUSTIN: No, no. There were 3.60 yen to a dollar. And I noticed on a list of souvenirs brought back that little kimonos were $5.00. It was very, very reasonable. We did have a surprise in Tokyo. We had our fifth child. I was 42 and thought I was beyond all that. She's 21 now, and she's proved a great addition to the family, but it was a real surprise.

Q: She was not your only one who had been born abroad.

AUSTIN: No. The others were born in South Carolina and Ohio. Ted and I had sat down in Lisbon as an engaged couple, and had decided we wanted four children — two boys, and then two girls — and that's what we got. And in Japan the "trailer." So in January of the next year we were told we were going to go next to New Delhi, and we began buying zippers and everything for New Delhi. And, indeed, we left there in June; our car and goods were all shipped over to India. We got to Washington, and they said, "There's

been an economy drive. That position has been abolished. Do you want to go to Panama instead since it's almost Labor Day and you'll want to get the children in school?" So we said, "Yes." And we went to Panama Labor Day. And we found ourselves, instead of in India where you needed zippers, in a country where you needed all summer clothes. A very warm, hospitable country. Again, a country in the news today, but which we were living in in a wonderful time. We had friends among the Panamanians, we had Canal Zone friends. The Embassy was small enough that every new person who came, we were able to have to dinner at the house.

Q: What was the political leadership like at that time?

AUSTIN: That was General Torrijos, Omar Torrijos, who died in the early '80s in a mysterious plane crash in Colombia. He was a rather benevolent dictator. Our maid, Leyda, swore by him. He helped the people, but he wasn't bad to us either.

Q: Was your life fairly comfortable there?

AUSTIN: We had a beautiful home with banana trees in the yard, a resident sloth, just very good living conditions. Excellent schools in the Canal Zone, and I substitute taught at the Balboa High School and loved doing that because I had been doing nothing but volunteer work.

Q: What were you teaching?

AUSTIN: The first class was shop that they called me for. I had heard that you should never turn them down, and the boy said, "You mean we can't use the machines with you?" I said, "No." So I brought them comic books the next day. I liked English and history the best, but I taught virtually everything.

Q: Did your children have decent schools in Tokyo?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. They went to an excellent boys' school, St. Mary's International School — top notch. The girls went to Seisen International, run by Spanish nuns. It wasn't as high-powered intellectually, but it was a very warm, loving school.

Q: And you had them with you all the time?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. They were never in boarding school. That was one of our choices. And as a Budget Officer, Ted was assigned to larger Embassies so it didn't ever come up. We had a motor boat on the canal, and the Ambassador had an island and we could go there and water ski and picnic. There was Quarry Heights, which you may have seen in the news lately, was where we got our catering done from. We just lived very nicely. As far as status there goes, I was the wife of the budget officer, but it wasn't very high in the hierarchy and I remember being the secretary of the wives group. The Ambassador's wife looked around and she said, “I don't care what the husband's position is, I want the wives to be able to have roles in this organization.” I felt she was being really democratic.

Q: She was active in the American women's club?

AUSTIN: It was the Embassy Women's Club. Ted was treasurer of the diplomatic circle which included Venezuela and other countries, but there wasn't really an American Women's Club, not the way there was in Rome later.

Q: What did the American Embassy Women's Club do?

AUSTIN: We put on a play once, and we drank coffee together. It was mostly social. I guess there was some attempt at helping newcomers.

Q: Keeping you all together.

AUSTIN: ...keeping us all together and it was important to belong, and if you couldn't go because you were working, this was not as good as if you were there at the service of.

I remember in Tokyo being rather pleased in my husband's evaluation by his seniors, to have a paragraph about me in the late '60s saying, “Although she's very busy with five children, she entertains nicely.”

Q: You knew that you were reported?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. I thought this was good. In 1972 I noticed I wasn't in anymore and I thought, “Oh, my God.” But it was because the rules had changed.

Q: Because of the '72 Directive?

AUSTIN: Yes. So it was better really.

Q: But you felt, as far as the language certificates — not receiving a language certificate — that something was wrong there?

AUSTIN: I was terribly busy with a large family. We had a wonderful maid, Masokosan, what a work ethic there was in Japan! She worked for me for four hours and after the baby came she worked eight hours from 1:00 to 9:00 p.m. She cooked, she served, if there was nothing on my list she went and cleaned the closets. It was so different from any other situation I've ever been in as far as work ethic goes. I was really well treated there.

Q: You had a large family there in Tokyo, but did you feel that was a huge post, huge city, and tremendous post and diplomatic group that was too overwhelming but it didn't involve you, because you had a family?

AUSTIN: Not particularly. I was enough involved with things in our administrative section, and we were asked to help at the residence. I remember asking my husband's boss's wife about drinking if we were on duty and she said, “Well, you could have a cocktail at the beginning and then take a soft drink.” In other words, it's all right to have a drink, but if you're working at a party, you certainly don't enjoy yourself too.

I've always found at any post, and in the United States, the children involve you in things. So I was one of the Girl Scout leaders; again, a situation if you want to have your daughters in the Girl Scouts, you do something. And I was in the St. Mary's school mothers club and helped with that, all that sort of thing.

Q: Was there a school PTA?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes definitely. And there was a large dance.

Q: Were your children quite young then?

AUSTIN: There were two in junior high, and two in elementary. They were in the St. Mary's band. They went skiing with St. Mary's. It was a very nice environment for them.

Q: And for you, I think.

AUSTIN: Oh, yes, indeed.

Q: You enjoyed your role as mother.

AUSTIN: And we traveled over to an island and had a vacation. It was run by the U.S. Navy so it was a dirt cheap vacation — a little island off Japan.

Q: Did you have home leave from Japan?

AUSTIN: Yes. After we finished there we went to Hawaii by plane, and then took the S.S. Lurline — our last ship trip — to Los Angeles, and then drove across the United States seeing our families.

Q: And did you return to Tokyo?

AUSTIN: No, no. It was a training post. It was my husband's first post as budget officer. We had home leave after the post. And then after Panama we drove home through all

the countries of Central America from Panama to Arizona, in our own car. We had a van and we had it packed full. And there was no place to put your litter, and our children, who had been brought up in a place like the Canal Zone where everything was regulated said, “What do we do with our trash?” So we would set it behind bushes, and then poor people would come up and take it almost before we had finished.

Q: I've seen that, I've experienced that.

AUSTIN: And our sons enjoyed every market we stopped at in Guatemala, El Salvador, and so on. They seemed to have saved their allowances, they had lots of money to buy things. It turned out later that while we were staying in the hotel before leaving, after we'd gotten out of our house, they had hit the jackpot at the slot machines in the hotel while we were at a farewell party, and they never told us until years later because they were under age. They were seventeen and sixteen at that time.

One thing that I wanted to emphasize was that I always felt very proud of being a Foreign Service secretary. I still think from knowing people in the Department, that it is a very special thing. I was glad to have done it, and I still look back on that as something very good that I did. In fact I know that I made a distinct decision not to stay with that life. After looking over women in their forties, who were still in the Foreign Service after many tours, and who had become bitter, disillusioned...

Q: You mean secretaries?

AUSTIN: Secretaries, yes...or even who had reached Vice Consul. Two in Naples had become — one, just a complete spinster, so devoted to her work. She was so grateful to me for helping her, a lovely woman. And then another one who had become blowsy, and you could see the dissipation of all those years on her face. They reached Vice Consul which was credible in that time, and I looked at that and I thought, “No, not really.” Perhaps if I'd gone ahead with the Foreign Service officer thing, having passed the exam, it would

have been different. But I still wanted home and children. So going back as a married couple took care of that.

I'll jump ahead, though, a minute, and say I did notice, when I worked in Rome at the embassy, that the status that I received — it was a PIT position — but the status I received (was) because of my husband's job (budget and management officer), and I didn't like that a bit. I wanted to stand on my own.

Q: Because you had stood on your own earlier.

AUSTIN: So part of the time in Rome I did do the long-term substituting.

Q: That was in the late '70s?

AUSTIN: ...and early '80s, yes, that was later. In the teaching I stood on my own, so I think I enjoyed that part of working in Rome more.

Q: What was the PIT position?

AUSTIN: I was taking the place of a young woman who hadn't arrived yet in the FDAG — the Food and Agriculture Section — and I was secretary to the deputy in that office for about three or four months.

Q: Fairly substantive work?

AUSTIN: It was a lot about food and agriculture. One thing I remember was typing the speech Andrew Young gave when he was there at an FAO meeting. It had to be typed triple spaced, in caps — that sort of thing. There was a lot of pressure at the time of this visit. We were there late, working, but I enjoyed that.

Q: You felt it was worthwhile. When you went to Tokyo, as a wife, for the first time in a different role, did you feel that you and your husband were both in the Foreign Service, that you were a team in the Foreign Service? Especially with your background earlier.

AUSTIN: I don't think my background made much difference there. What mattered there was my loyal backing-up of my husband. I started off on the right foot in Tokyo by writing a note to my husband's boss' wife saying we've been assigned, and I'm glad to be coming. Because she said, “Well, she has more manners than the last one.” She thought this was a good sign that I had written the note, and that I knew. So that came from my former life, a little bit, knowing what to do.

Q: Let me ask you. Did you do that on your own, or had you attended a course on protocol for women that said it was polite to write?

AUSTIN: I did it on my own. I never got to any courses. I couldn't leave the children. No, I did that on my own. I had read the Post Report, and it's possible that in the Post Report it said something about that.

Q: Did you feel that you were a partner?

AUSTIN: Not an equal partner. I felt as though I were the secondary person of the team.

Q: I was wondering if some of that attitude had anything to do with your having been in the Foreign Service on your own, as a secretary before, as an independent, and now you were one of a team?

AUSTIN: It might have. I know that when my husband was trying to decide whether to take the Foreign Service job, or take one with COMSAT which was just starting then and he was offered a position. COMSAT would have been around Washington, D.C., and he said about Foreign Service, “You know you like it because you did it before.” So as one of the

reasons for choosing, he said, “You can have a maid,” because that had been the case before, always having someone to cook for me.

Q: Oh, with a large family that was important.

AUSTIN: That was important, although I still like cooking.

Q: Did you ever hear the phrase: Two for the price of one?

AUSTIN: Yes. They got it. They got two for the price of one there.

Q: Did other women ever talk about that, that phrase, or the fact that you were being used, or did they just accept it?

AUSTIN: I think they more or less accepted it, and did as well as they could. There were a few very bitter wives in that apartment building in Tokyo. But, for instance, Meg Gregg — you know Donald Gregg is now our Ambassador to South Korea — Meg was one of the wives there who I thought had a wonderful attitude. Although she was supporting her husband's activities, she helped with the Girl Scout troop, and she showed every sign of enjoying everything that she did. She was a good example, I think. So you have to do it, so you do it...

(end Tape 1, Side A — -Begin Tape 1, Side B)

Q: ...in recent years for wives to work certainly changed that whole feeling of accepting a role as a Foreign Service wife, which we did in our day, not even considering whether we should be paid for it.

AUSTIN: I think the economic question in the past 20 years has become much more important, and in addition, who would take care of the children overseas, and are the children safe. At the times when we were there, while serving overseas there wasn't any

extra economic necessity because we had the rent and utilities paid and that was better than it had been in private industry.

Q: Did you feel unsafe in any of your posts, either single or with a family.

AUSTIN: I'm glad you mention that because from what I've heard of Naples today, it is not as safe. As I walked around Naples, or went on the street cars, I felt absolutely safe day or night in those days which is certainly not the case nowadays. Bucharest was even safer because although you were being followed by security police, there was no street crime — no robbery, no murders, no trouble of that sort. Tokyo was the same. The children were able to ride the subway back and forth to their activities quite freely, and there was a great deal of honesty in the Japanese character. You couldn't tip, for example. They just didn't have such an emphasis on getting things, except by hard work. Panama the same, very safe.

We haven't talked about Rome yet. But when we got to Rome in 1978, although it was the time of the Red Brigade and there were fears about terrorism of that sort, it was not directed against Americans. An Italian who wanted to steal from you on the street didn't hurt you physically. So that was better than Washington from where we had come, because in Washington there was more street crime. When we went to Rome in 1978, then we found (there) more violent street crime.

Q: When you left Panama you went to Cambridge. Tell me about that.

AUSTIN: Yes. It was changing a couple of climate zones as far as clothes go, and we were fortunate to find a mild winter in Massachusetts.

Q: Tell me the circumstances in which you went to Cambridge.

AUSTIN: Ted had applied for an academic year in systems analysis which would enhance his budget work. He would have been sent either to Stanford or to MIT. It turned out to be

MIT. He took a course in Washington the summer of '72, and then we went up there. We found a nice home in Watertown in August of 1972. It had many good things about it, that academic year. He was able to ride a bicycle to classes at MIT. He learned bee keeping in the little semester between semesters at MIT.

Q: You were there for one full year?

AUSTIN: We were there only for an academic year. We left in June.

Q: Were your children all with you?

AUSTIN: One was at college — we had dropped off the first son at college. My aunts lived in nearby Needham so those were all pluses. I found it a terrible shock, after having been in Panama with a servant that helped with the babysitting, to be home with a four-year-old. Also, the New Englanders were not as friendly as the Panamanians, I'm sorry to say it but it's true. It was harder to make friends.

Q: (They are) more reserved.

AUSTIN: Yes. Also, I was not a part of the MIT life at all. I did join what they called The Technology Matrons, a wives group. I did teach English as a second language to young Japanese and Italian women, and we did have them over for a party. The children's school activities absorbed me a little bit, but it was a rather lonely year. It was like re-entry, but not re-entry to Washington where we knew so many people. Re-entry to another part of the country. It wasn't my finest hour.

But after that year it was excellent professionally for Ted, so from that point of view well worth it. At the end of that year we received an assignment in Washington, D.C. in the Department. We had been away six years, I guess, by that time. My daughter, Connie, was just finishing sixth grade and they asked her to fill out the courses she wanted to take in seventh grade in Watertown, and so she did. But the language choice made her

very sad. In Watertown, an ethnic town, there were three languages offered in seventh grade. They were Armenian, Italian, or French which corresponded to the ethnic makeup of Watertown. Connie said, “But I know Spanish.” And I said, “Don't worry, we're moving.”

So we moved to Falls Church. We bought our home and Connie shone in Spanish.

Q: You had a proper re-entry back in a sort of official life in the State Department Foreign Service?

AUSTIRight.

Q: Was that difficult?

AUSTIN: The only difficult thing was the year in Massachusetts.

Q: So you had gotten over some of that re-entry business when you came to Washington?

AUSTIN: Yes. We had our proper winter clothes, and so on, and I was able to start substitute teaching down here because the youngest child entered kindergarten. So that way, with the help of a neighbor who took care of her after school, I was able to do something professionally because by that time the older ones were starting college and that meant we needed college money.

Q: You were really into another career as a teacher?

AUSTIN: Right. I had done it right after marriage in South Carolina and then I took it up again because it is something that goes with the children's schedules.

Q: What were you teaching when you came to Falls Church?

AUSTIN: Art, anything, but the things I was certified in were government, history and French. Those I was certified in.

Q: What level was that?

AUSTIN: I chose to do it mostly in high school, sometimes junior high, but junior high is much more of a challenge. Junior high takes a lot more discipline. I've always been successful in teaching by being nice, by having them like me, and by my having children whom they know and like. If you get into a group where you need to be real tough, I couldn't do it.

Q: Did you teach after that?

AUSTIN: I've taught as a substitute off and on in Rome through 1982, but not since then. Another job sort of related to Foreign Service. I worked for a while in 1976 at the membership committee of AFSA down there at the American Foreign Service building on E Street. That was very interesting.

Q: On scholarships?

AUSTIN: Not as much on scholarships, but on the members all over the world. I helped a man named Cecil Sanner, Mr. Sanner, and I liked that very much but they abolished the position so I had to go back to substituting. That was good because I was sort of near Foreign Service again, something I sort of missed in Washington.

Q: And now that your older children were older you felt a need, or you had the time to do more.

AUSTIN: Exactly.

Q: As you look back on all those years, either being alone or married, and/or with children living abroad, what were some of the major problems you felt you had to deal with in the Foreign Service life?

AUSTIN: All as a total picture?

Q: Uprooting, or...

AUSTIN: I guess I minded when we went to Japan, after having been in the United States from 1953 to '67, then I did miss the uprooting. Not so much from a place.

Q: You mean you felt the uprooting?

AUSTIN: I felt the uprooting when we went back in that first time because we had stopped to see our families in Texas and Arizona, and somehow I knew I would never see my father again. Both our fathers died during that tour in Tokyo and that was hard. At that time they didn't pay your way back. It was a real sacrifice to come home for a funeral, and to a funeral when you've lost somebody and you feel guilty for having gone.

Q: Were you able to come back?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. Ted came back for his Dad, and then I came back for my Dad.

Q: I know that feeling. My father died when I was in New Delhi and our Ambassador's wife, Steb Bowles, came over. She'd heard about it and sat down with me, and said she'd been through that. It was a good feeling to have another person that far away just to sit down and sympathize.

AUSTIN: People were very, very good to us at those times, but I felt the guilt of having left within the two years when we would lose both fathers. And yet from the point of view of the advantages for Ted and the children...

Q: Well, losing one's older parents is certainly difficult when you're overseas, but did you feel that your children missed anything in not being with, or getting to know cousins, and grandparents, and aunts and uncles in those long years when you were away?

AUSTIN: Some of them came and visited us overseas which was nice, and we made the most of our home leaves to visit with the extended families. So that really wasn't a loss. Economically for my husband's career, the move was well worth it, and I don't think he has ever regretted having chosen it. In fact, we perhaps should have stayed in longer. We have missed it since and thought about doing the TDYs.

As far as other things that might have been uncomfortable overseas, in Panama all of the parents ran scared because drugs were rampant. In the schools, and in the society, and because of the children connected with the Embassy or AID, it really would be a blot against the United States if it became public. And, in fact, in one case during those three years, it was on the pages of the Tabloid that an Embassy son was a dealer. This made everybody very, very anxious. Those years 1969 to '72 were years when it was the years of rebellion perhaps among youth. Although the children of the Embassy in Panama were not running wild in any other way, there was always the fear of drugs. That was the only blot on that beautiful landscape.

Q: There more than in other posts?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. I imagine in Rome there must have been some, but it did not affect the circle of friends of our daughter at Marymount, or our daughter at St. Stephen's. It just didn't come up. It wasn't in their circles.

Continuation of interview: January 26, 1990

Q: You mentioned some of the joys of suddenly, as a very young secretary in those early years, traveling first class across the Atlantic. Do you have any thoughts about then, or even later, that you feel the perks of Foreign Service life were justified?

AUSTIN: Oh, absolutely. I felt they were most justified, and I contrast with my life as a secretary in Washington on $45.00 a week, paying my father back $200.00 for a trip the previous year out of that, with first class travel to Naples on the Vulcania, and staying in

nice hotels, living there on per diem while waiting for a visa for Romania, and being able to travel to Switzerland, Florence, Rome, and do many of the things I hadn't been able to do in the States. And yet, because I did work very hard, I felt the perks and the free time that I had earned it.

Q: And for the times, it was not an easy time for living standards in that part of Europe so soon after the war.

AUSTIN: Well, it was quite cold in Naples. The apartment was not centrally heated. The marble floors were cold. The water was never hot, and it was a bit more stark than life in the United States. There were shortages.

Q: And in Washington you had worked hard at the State Department. Did you feel the salary was a good one then?

AUSTIN: It was my first, so what can I say? You have to start somewhere. I was in the division of Exchange of Persons, a repatriation program, and the work was quite interesting there. I was studying shorthand so I could qualify to be a Foreign Service secretary, which was my dream. I passed the course and was able to enter the Foreign Service and leave the State Department domestic life. I was really very happy about that.

Q: You did go back eventually.

AUSTIN: Yes, I did. One thing I should mention too, is that at that time most of the young women whom I served with between 1949 and 1953 were college graduates serving as Foreign Service secretaries. I didn't feel that I was not among my peers.

Q: Was that one of the qualifications?

AUSTIN: Oh, no, no. It just happened that they were able to attract that caliber of young women.

Q: Did they all pretty much fit that category, well educated?

AUSTIN: Yes.

Q: Tell me a little bit about what you're doing now in the State Department.

AUSTIN: I'm working in the medical division. It's a new job which involves psychological testing of contractors going the Eastern Europe: the Eastern Bloc, China, Nicaragua also, Cuba too. Any of the Eastern Bloc countries. And this is because, although Foreign Service people are predictable quantities and we know about them, the contractors come in to work overseas and we don't know much about their backgrounds, and this testing tends to screen out anyone who might not fit in under the rather restrictive conditions in posts in Eastern Europe.

Q: Are these people who are replacing local...

AUSTIN: Replacing Foreign Service nationals. It's a Foreign Service national replacement program. I'm not sure whether it was 1985 or '86 when the Soviets said we could not employ Soviet nationals in our Embassy there. So this testing program has grown by leaps and bounds and now covers the other countries, mostly it is the Eastern European. People who are going to serve as maintenance, support people, janitors, handymen, drivers, and some of them are electricians and plumbers, people in those categories, from Texas where the economy has gone downhill since the early 1980s. The others are often college graduates who majored in Russian or some other Eastern European language, and just want to go there to be in a country where they can hear the language a little bit.

Q: I was going to ask if they will receive any training before they leave, or once they get to their post, in language studies?

AUSTIN: The Pacific Architects & Engineers Company gives them the language course at FSI. They have a course in terrorism before they go, and security, and so on. Most of them

who go over there are very successful. Someone said that those who are most successful are the ones who have a skill. As in this country, when the plumber comes to the door, they say, “Thank God you're here.” And this means that they are feeling useful.

Q: Will they take their families in most cases?

AUSTIN: Some of them take their families. For others, the families stay home, the man goes and works, and they have visits back and forth.

Q: Is this because of limited housing, or security, or both?

AUSTIN: Or maybe the wife and children don't feel comfortable going, or they have other family obligations.

Q: I would think this would be very special for you because of your experience as a Foreign Service, not only secretary and wife and mother, but your recruiting people directly that are coming into the Foreign Service itself.

AUSTIN: I find it very, very interesting, and I enjoy being able to answer their questions, and help make them feel a little bit more comfortable about it. It's nice to still be able to make a contribution to the State Department.

Q: Which makes me think about the Foreign Service nationals. Did you ever find in the posts where you were, as either secretary or wife, different attitudes in the different countries toward Americans on the part of the nationals who worked in the embassies and legations?

AUSTIN: Well, when I went to Naples first in 1949, it was very soon after World War II, and I think the American attitude was more or less what you would expect, more natural. The Italian attitude was a little bit more ambivalent. I believe there was some bitterness there partly because the Americans were so overwhelmingly prosperous compared to

the average Italian at that time. I think there was some feeling there, and perhaps the Americans were not tactful enough about not flaunting it.

Q: A hard position to be in.

AUSTIN: I remember one instance where there was a party at the Consul General's and no Italian employees were invited. It was strictly for the Americans, which was a little bit, in view of today's more enlightened attitude, a little bit insensitive.

Q: Were there ever any special parties, or functions, for the local employees? We had the experience in India where the Bowles had regularly all kinds of parties and festivals for the employees and their families. This was in the '60s.

AUSTIN: In the late '40s that had not happened yet. We, young secretaries, found some of the young Italian employees very good company and not just to practice our Italian with. They were very nice people, often law students still studying while they worked part time at the Consulate General, and we feel our experience was enhanced by these relationships, not really relationships, but friendships — I don't like that word, relationships.

And then in Romania, as I may have mentioned before, you really couldn't have Romanian friends. You had your employees in the home, and the local employees at the legation, but otherwise you maybe met them as an enemy, in ways. People from the Foreign Ministry knew that you were on opposite sides with the question of communism.

Q: Well, that created tensions. I experienced that in Yugoslavia. You knew you were reported on, you knew you were followed, and it created a barrier that was hard to...

AUSTIN: It couldn't be natural, no.

Q: I suppose that's true — I don't know about now — but earlier at least in most of the communist bloc countries.

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. I don't believe that fraternization is encouraged at all. For instance, these contractors who go over.

Q: Are they getting more than language training? Are they getting any training at FSI? Or is it mostly on the contract?

AUSTIN: I think it's language training and then, as I mentioned, the security and terrorism.

Q: I was wondering if they're getting any briefing on what to expect in the community, and their living conditions?

AUSTIN: I believe so. I think that the contracting companies try to present as realistic a picture as possible to them. Many of them have gone to Saudi Arabia and other countries — Antarctica — and have worked overseas before. So it's just a question of doing their job.

Q: Where you are working now, are the people in the office all Foreign Service, or are there some general service employees?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes, it's a mixture. The medical division is set up largely to conduct physical examinations for Foreign Service people going overseas. They don't really treat general services people who have the whole of Washington for their medical care. But they do employ many general services people.

Q: Does it work well together? Or do some feel that there is a difference?

AUSTIN: I think they work well together. I think that there is still a certain panache to being a Foreign Service staff person, or a Foreign Service officer. There's just something special. That, of course, means that every four years you go overseas, and there is the five year extension and I think there is an outer limit of eight years if there are severe family problems.

Q: In some of your personal notes you let me look at — letters home, and scrapbooks, referred to parties and weekends away, and of course as a young person we all find that's a wonderful distraction from work before having a family. But one thing I think of in the partying context in the Foreign Service — receptions, luncheons, dinners — all the official functions alcohol consumption is part of it. I even notice in all the British films on television, (someone is) always pouring drinks the minute they come into a room. Did you feel it was part of the social scheme of things, or did you just not think about it at all?

AUSTIN: I think it was very much an accepted part of the social scheme of things in every post in which I served. In Naples, I remember coming in and being asked what I would like to drink, and I was a novice at that time, and I told the host “scotch and coke”, and he said, “Really?” And I said, firmly, “Yes”. It was a terrible mixture. But I learned what went with what, and it was so inexpensive at every Foreign Service post to drink. There was not a budget question. In Bucharest, even at the luncheons, there were the drinks before lunch, followed by the white wine with the first course, the red wine with the second, champagne with dessert, and even an aperitif afterwards, and then back to work, and then dinner.One of the things I did was to begin a collection of every single kind of liqueur that was in the Embassy commissary. There were all these bottles of all these exotic things, so you could really offer your guests a lot. And it was not a question of it's costing anything. It was more sort of a hobby at that time.

Q: Did it interfere with work on the part of anyone who had been to these luncheons?

AUSTIN: I never saw it interfering with anybody's work. It's possible that we might have joked a little bit about people who didn't come back to the office.

Q: But, at least those who came did their work.

AUSTIN: Yes, indeed. You certainly had an obligation.

Q: Tell me what you know about any programs at present in the State Department aimed at drug abuse prevention. Not only for employees but for their families, and children.

AUSTIN: I think the Department of State now has come to the realization that alcohol, as well as other drugs, are potential hazards to Americans serving overseas, and there is an alcohol and drug awareness program. George Sweeny is the director of that program. He travels to different countries, and people can come and consult him, and they do certainly try to involve the youth and the adults who might need help.

Q: At the post?

AUSTIN: At the post, as well as when they come for their annual physical. I would say it's in that bi-annual physical when the question comes up of whether a person has need of this (program), or his other dependents.

Q: And you mentioned (drug awareness) films at the Department ...these are video tapes, aren't they?

AUSTIN: Yes. The Department has been making those available to posts to highlight the potential.

Q: Have you seen any of those?

AUSTIN: Yes, I have. Some of them speak to parents, and some of them speak to young people. I think the hardest thing is to find appropriate ones that speak to the children.

Q: Are they used in the schools also?

AUSTIN: Well, they're going to be, I believe. I'm not sure.

Q: Are they focused on alternative activities especially for the children?

AUSTIN: One I saw showed a young person who had been rehabilitated and the things he was doing to substitute for his previous drug use.

Q: Very interesting because in the early '70s I was in the medical office helping to develop some drug abuse prevention programs.

AUSTIN: In the early '70s I was in Panama and I remember one wife of an AID official saying to me with anguish in her voice, “This can be a very bad place,” because Panama was the crossroads of world trade and culture — crossroads of the world — or some expression like that was on the license plates — but it was also the crossroads of drugs.

Q: That's different from the present.

AUSTIN: Apparently with General Noriega.

Q: Are there any special events you think of in your Foreign Service experience relating to holidays? Any Christmas that didn't seem like Christmas, or was there a special one? Or some national holiday?

AUSTIN: I remember, again going back to Naples. Perhaps because it was the first post it stands out. But there was a very lovely woman, Mary Willis McKenzie — in fact, she'd been in Poland when the Nazis came, and was evacuated to Paris — anyhow, she took us all under her wing and had a marvelous Thanksgiving dinner.

Q: In her home?

AUSTIN: In her home, yes. We had arrived on the 11th of November so we were very new there. I must say the martinis really flowed and by the time the dinner was over we were not missing home at all.

Q: Was there turkey?

AUSTIN: There was turkey, yes.

Q: She must have been a marvelous cook.

AUSTIN: She had her ways. I don't know where she got the turkey. There was no American base, and no commissary at that time. But she had invited a little group. She was a Kentucky southerner and very hospitable. I always think of her as being very motherly. We were about 23, she was all of 42.

Q: But she knew what it was like for you newcomers. Did she do all the cooking? Or did she have a cook?

AUSTIN: She probably had someone to do the dishes, but I'm sure she did the cooking.

Q: An American menu?

AUSTIN: Oh, absolutely American, and we were so grateful. I can't remember really what happened at Christmas, but I think by Christmas we had our sea legs. But it was that first arrival at post that mattered. As far as other ones go, one of the most different ones was in Panama — Christmas in the tropics. There was a little area called Bethlehem where all the houses had the lights up, and they keep them up all year. Whenever they entertain, they turn on their Christmas lights. We lived near there. The palm trees, and the bananas on the trees, and so on, didn't remind us of New York or Washington at all.

Q: But probably in the context of the first Christmas, it was more like that?

AUSTIN: I was just thinking of that. More like the real Bethlehem.

Q: Did you take things like Christmas decorations with you, or a plastic tree?

AUSTIN: We took the decorations. I think we bought the trees which were sort of shabby in Panama. I did notice in Tokyo that one of the pleasures was being able to have our

maid work on Christmas day because her holiday was New Year's in Japan. So she was happy to work for us on Christmas. Usually I celebrate an American Christmas with exhaustion on my part, trying to do all the dinner, and gifts...

Q: Did you have all your children with you there in Tokyo?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. The oldest was perhaps at the very beginning of high school. So those were the golden years when we were all together.

Q: I'm sorry. Did you say you did take most of your decorations with you? Or did you improvise and make some, or pick some up?

AUSTIN: I've never been very good at that sort of thing so I usually brought them. And then later on when we had posts where there were PXs, we bought them there.

Q: Good old PXs.

AUSTIN: Yes. At the beginning there weren't any, but I've certainly participated when we did get them.

Q: Did you have the availability of PXs living in Romania?

AUSTIN: Oh, no. Actually, when we went to Vienna, we could.

Q: That's what I meant. Could you get out to...

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. We got out and we had cards for purchases. Cigarettes were rationed — and by the way, everybody smoked. It was just a very common practice.

Q: Cigarettes were not expensive, were they?

AUSTIN: No, and nobody knew about lung cancer.

Q: What did PXs mean to you then, coming from Romania and going to Vienna.

AUSTIN: Oh, chocolate bars...

Q: What was it like going across the border into that different world?

AUSTIN: Well, it meant a sense of freedom. A sense of feeling lighter. And certainly a sense of the shopping, the comforts of fresh stockings, and Hersheys, and the cigarettes.

Q: What about other things that you probably didn't find on the local market in Bucharest — toothpaste?

AUSTIN: Cosmetics, yes, of course.

Q: Clothing, food. Were you allowed to take some things back with you?

AUSTIN: Oh, yes. There was no problem. You could bring back those things. My mother sent me things through the pouch. I've seen little notes that I've stuck in scrapbooks about little boxes of ivory snow, and she was so careful about sending me those things as I asked for them.

Q: When you were living abroad with children growing, did you have any problems with clothing them in proper size shoes, or anything of that sort? Or were you usually where you could get what you needed.

AUSTIN: Because Ted was a budget officer, we were usually in a large Embassy, in a large city, and, in fact, in all three of those posts the military bases were available with their PXs. We were going to be transferred from Tokyo to New Delhi, and the post report said there was no PX, and to bring zippers for one thing, because the Indians buttoned, and if you wanted zippers you had to bring them — and all kinds of sewing equipment. Where we ended up was Panama, and Panama had lots of zippers. Also, winter clothing for the

children in each size, which, of course, didn't do in Panama and that they'd outgrown by the time we got to Boston.

Q: Did you ever have to rely on Sears Roebuck catalogs, Montgomery Ward, Best & Company, or any of those for ordering clothes?

AUSTIN: I did a little of that but more as a novelty. What we did in the early days was, we had dressmakers. And your mother sent you bolts of cloth and you went to the local dressmaker and had something stunning made.

Q: From cloth you bought there? Or silk that you bought in Italy?

AUSTIN: From gifts from home, or gifts of all those materials, and it was very reasonable.

Q: You have a large family of children. I was wondering if any of your children's choices of study and/or professions has been affected by their Foreign Service life? The traveling, the other cultural experiences?

AUSTIN: Well, perhaps indirectly. One daughter did have a joint major in biology and Spanish, but she went into microbiology. I feel that in general they are very well-rounded human beings. They've had the culture and the advantages of travel. None of them has elected so far to go into Foreign Service. But I think they all appreciated it. Perhaps even more afterwards than during. The schools that our children were privileged to attend were excellent. They came back able to participate and compete in American universities. My husband and I both feel that we wouldn't give anything for our Foreign Service experience. And even under today's difficult conditions in the world, I would still think it would be a wonderful career.

Q: That sounds positive.

AUSTIN: It was positive.

***

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Theodore L. Austin

Spouse Entered Service: 1/67Left Service: 9/30/84 You Entered Service:9/49Left Service: 6/53

Status:

1. FS Secretar1949-53

2. FS Spous1967-84

Posts, including Washington, in chronological order, with dates.

As Secretary: 1949-50Consulate General, Naples, Italy 1950-51Legation, Bucharest, Romania 1952-53Embassy, Lisbon, Portugal

As Spouse: 1967-69Embassy, Tokyo, Japan 1969-72Embassy, Panama City, Panama 1972-73MIT, Cambridge, Mass. 1973-78Department of State, Washington, DC 1978-82Embassy, Rome, Italy 1982-84Department of State, Washington, DC

Spouse's Position: Budget and Management Office

Place and Date (optional) of birth: New York City, May 6, 1926

Maiden Name: Lillian STELLE

Parents:

James C. STELLE - purchasing agent

Lillian R. STELLE - teacher

Schools: White Plains High School, White Plains, New York Cornell University, Ithaca, New York Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, BS Political Science, French 1948

Date and Place of Marriage: November 7, 1953 - Warren, Pennsylvania

Profession: Secretary, Teacher (History, Govt., Languages)

Children:

James, 1954

Robert, 1955

Elizabeth, 1958

Constance, 1961

Patricia, 1968

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post

TokyoChairman of Summer Youth Recreation Program

PanamaSecretary of the Embassy Women's Club; sub. teacher in Canal Zone Rome: Volunteer assistant to ELO coordinator; Secretary to Food and Agriculture Section Deputy Chief at US Embassy; sub. teaching at Overseas School of Rome and Marymount; Secretary at Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations.

B. In Washington, D.C.

Cornell Club of Washington Board Member; Chair of International Students Visit for two years; Secondary Schools Committee 1982-present.Realtor for Shannon and Luchs from 1883-85; Secretary at Medical Division of Dept. of State, 1988-present

End of interview